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El Salvador is coming to the end of a civil war that cost more than 80,000 lives. This thesis surveys the factors which led to this war and, soon thereafter, to United States involvement. The historical, economic, social, and political development of El Salvador determined the pattern of land tenure, dominated by large coffee plantations and concentrated ownership of land in the hands of a few elite, would eventually lead to a politically and economically powerful oligarchy. Oligarchic domination of politics, supported by the military, created a situation which denied the majority of the population access to economic security and political power. The decade of the 1970s brought the polarization of politics, solidifying of the leftist organizations and the reaction of the military in politics. The impact of policies that a succession of juntas enacted following the 1979 coup are the examined along with the proclamations and reform policies of the successive juntas to determine the successes and failures and their impact on the political realm. The paper concludes with the election of 1982 where civilian politicians were put in power for the first time since 1931.

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PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION**

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Fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree**

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

JAMES R. CROUCH, SR., MAJ, USA

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE DECADE OF THE SEVENTIES IN EL SALVADOR: PRELUDE TO REVOLUTION by
MAJ James R. Crouch, Sr., USA

El Salvador is coming to the end of a civil war that cost more than 80,000 lives. This thesis surveys the factors which led to this war and, soon thereafter, to United States involvement. The historical, economic, social, and political development of El Salvador determined the pattern of land tenure, dominated by large coffee plantations and concentrated ownership of land in the hands of a few elite, would eventually lead to a politically and economically powerful oligarchy. Oligarchic domination of politics, supported by the military, created a situation which denied the majority of the population access to economic security and political power. The decade of the 1970s brought the polarization of politics, solidifying of the leftist organizations and the reaction of the military in politics. The impact of policies that a succession of juntas enacted following the 1979 coup are the examined along with the proclamations and reform policies of the successive juntas to determine the successes and failures and their impact on the political realm. The paper concludes with the election of 1982 where civilian politicians were put in power for the first time since 1931.

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No officer in the military can be successful without a spouse that is loving and supportive of whatever crazy endeavor that is dreamed up. Pam has put up with this for over twenty years (more than 15 in the Army). She is the reason that I have been all that I can be, no matter how mediocre that is. I have conveniently been away from home during the most trying family times and she has always managed to come through like a true pro. No one should be sentenced to the life of an Army wife! The kids, James, Adam, and Lisa have probably suffered the most during this time. The best year of our lives was spent with me behind a computer terminal. No one can understand what it is like to be a brat if you haven't been one. They have been absolutely super in their support and understanding.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

El Salvador is coming to the end of a civil war that cost more than 80,000 lives. The purpose of this thesis is to survey the factors which led to this war and, soon thereafter, to United States involvement.

The introductory chapter provides background material concerning the historical, economic, social, and political development of El Salvador. Economic development is discussed in order to explain the rise of coffee as the most important product in the agro-export industry. The pattern of land tenure, dominated by large coffee plantations and concentrated ownership of land in the hands of a few elite, would eventually lead to a politically and economically powerful oligarchy. Oligarchic domination of politics, supported by the military, created a situation which denied the majority of

the population access to economic security and political power. This resulted in political polarization of the society and repression of those expressing discontent. This chapter will cover events up to the 1969 Soccer War.

In order to clarify terminology used in this thesis, the following explanation on the use of Right, Center, and Left is necessary. Each of these groups include individuals and organizations. The Right includes those opposed to changes in the status quo and who often use repressive means to prevent such change. The Center seeks to affect gradual reform in the status quo through the democratic process. The Left believes that revolution is the only means to eliminate the status quo and replace it with a structure that can provide the necessary changes to improve the country.

Chapter 2 chronicles events from the 1969 Soccer War until the coup of 1979, focusing on growing opposition to the government, lack of political alternatives, and increasing levels of repression. Electoral politics presented a vehicle of reform during the 1960s, but came to an end after the 1972 elections. The moderate reforms of the government and the electoral gains of the opposition provided hope for the majority of the population after the blatant fraud that robbed the anti-oligarchic opposition

of their election gains in the 1972 elections. An assessment of the decade of the 1970s examines the polarization of politics, solidifying of the leftist organizations, and the reaction of the military in politics. The coup of 1979 presented a real opportunity for reform and a centrist solution to the polarization of politics.

The impact of policies that a succession of juntas enacted following the 1979 coup are the subject of Chapter 3. The chapter will examine the proclamations and reform policies of the successive juntas to determine the successes and failures and the impact on the political realm. The chapter concludes with the election of 1982 where civilian politicians were put in power for the first time since 1931.

I relied primarily on secondary sources in the compilation of this work. Two books are essential to understanding the turbulent decade of the seventies and the juntas that followed the coup of 1979. Tommie S. Montgomery in her Revolution in El Salvador gives the only comprehensive coverage of the coup that I found. She also provides an excellent analysis of the involvement of the Catholic Church in El Salvador. Enrique Baloyra's El Salvador in Transition is a widely quoted scholarly treatment of pre- and

post-coup events. He presents a well-documented analysis that is required reading for any student of Salvadoran or Latin American politics.

Background

El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in Central America. Having borders with Guatemala in the west and Honduras in the north and east, El Salvador is unique in Central America because it has only a single coast, which is on the Pacific. With three distinct physical zones -- the coastal plain, the central highlands, and the mountains -- temperatures are generally moderate, except along the coast where extreme heat and humidity are frequent. The coastal plain provides much arable land, but is second to the central highlands in size and production. The rainy season lasts from May until October, but occasionally extends to December.

Figure 1

Political Features of El Salvador

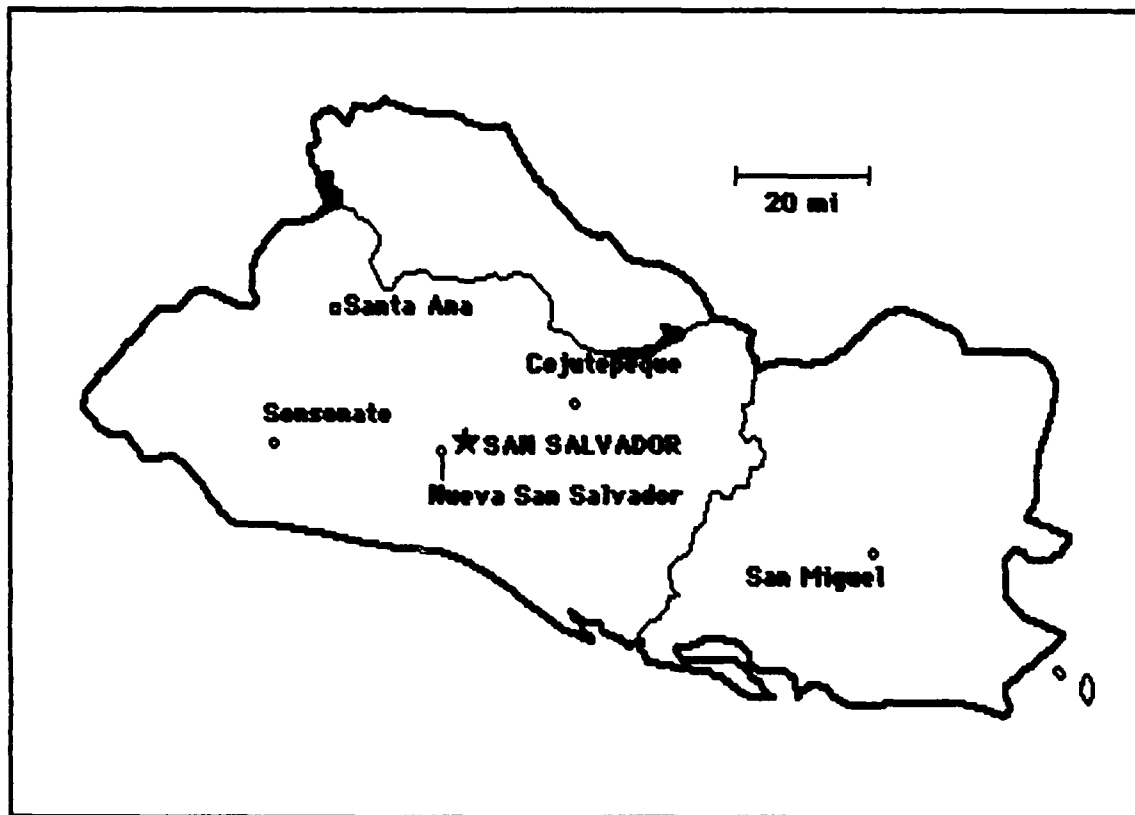
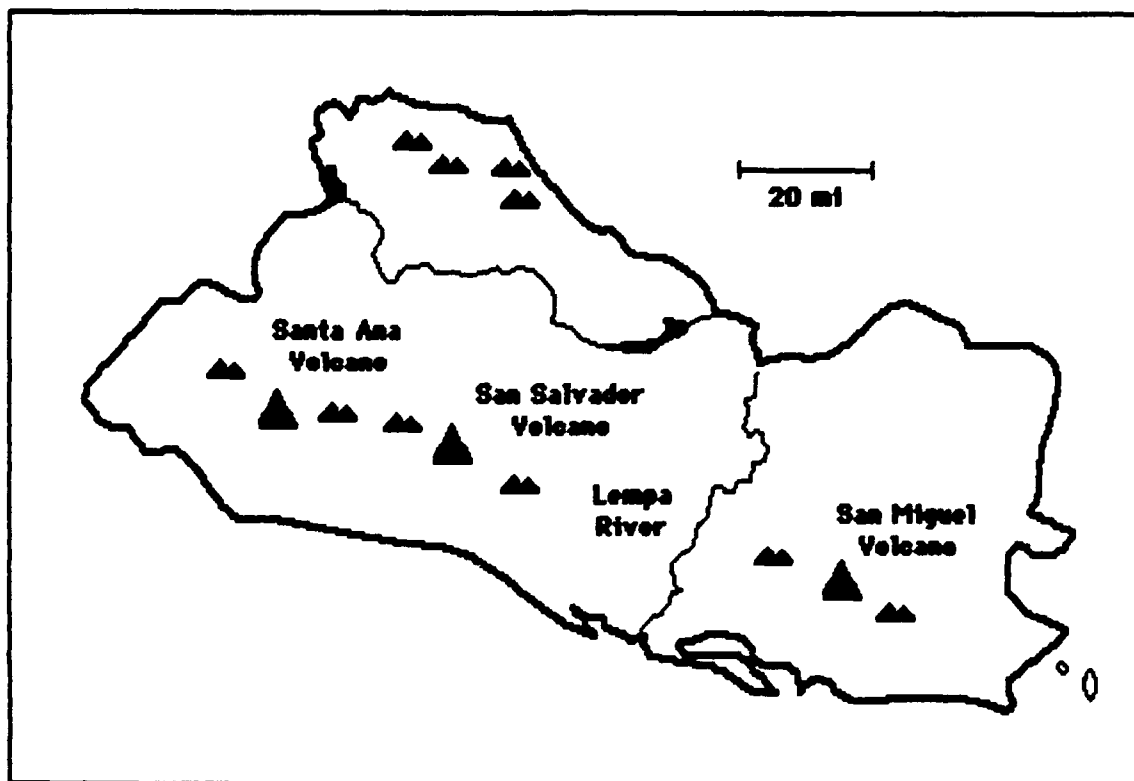


Figure 2

Geographical features of El Salvador



Population

When El Salvador was conquered by the Spanish in 1525, the area was inhabited by the Pipil tribe, which had an advanced civilization and culture similar to the Aztecs. The Pipils built numerous roads, established several cities, and had a written language. Over the years, the Indians assimilated into the Spanish-European culture and blended into the society by cohabitation and intermarriage, so that today ladinos (called mestizos in most Latin American countries), a mixture of Spanish and Indian blood, compose the majority of the population. Estimates of the size of the Indian population in the 1970s, as defined from a cultural perspective, range from 4 to 16 per cent.¹ The variance in the estimates is due largely to the fact that the Salvadoran census does not have a clear definition of what constitutes an Indian. Salvadorans recognize full-blooded Indians who do not follow traditional Indian culture as ladinos. Very few Indians, except in remote locations of the western mountains, practice the traditional rituals and way of dress.

¹United States Department of State, El Salvador Background Notes (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1981), 116.

Economic Development

The economy has always been based on agriculture, and the history of agricultural development defines how society is organized. In order to understand the social classes of El Salvador, it is necessary to understand the development of the country's export agriculture industry, which is based on coffee. The power in El Salvador rests in the oligarchy who control the agro-export enterprises. In the 1850s, El Salvador decided to convert from the production of indigo to coffee. This radically changed the concentration of land holdings. Small farms were absorbed into coffee fincas (plantations) through legislation sponsored by plantation owners and pushed through the legislature. The coffee boom continued throughout the 1870s. During the latter half of the 19th century, coffee became the basis of economic and political power, and the coffee growers controlled the cultivation, production, and export of their products. The power of the oligarchy and the pattern of land tenure can be demonstrated in the statistic that, by 1941, farms larger than 100 hectares, representing .7 per cent of all farms, accounted for 38.7 per cent of the land under cultivation. This land tenure pattern persisted to the 1970s.²

²Beloryra, Enrique, *El Salvador in Transition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 28.

Control of politics by the oligarchy is clearly shown in the legislation that they were able to pass in order to gain control of Indian communal lands and to retain a source of cheap labor. Because there was no mechanization in the coffee growing business, cheap labor was required to keep production costs low and profits high. The constitution of 1886 established the land tenure patterns and societal structure of the country by outlawing communal lands and creating justices of the peace, who operated in rural areas and had the power to force peasants to work for plantation owners at low wage rates. The justices used vagrancy laws, which were ostensibly passed to control peasants who appeared to have no means of support, in order to legitimize forced peasant labor and to repress any unrest as a means to maintain order in the countryside. Private armies of the plantation owners also assisted in the task of maintaining order, usually through repressive means. Elements of these forces ultimately evolved into the Salvadoran National Guard and Treasury Police. The use of private armies also tied the security forces in with the oligarchy who have relied on their services throughout this century to maintain order and protect the plantations against peasant unrest.³

³Montgomery, Tommie Sue, Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 42-44.

Government

Even though the political process was dominated by the dictatorial oligarchy, this elite class paid lip service to El Salvador's democratic facade since the promulgation of the country's first constitution in January 1841, some twenty years after independence. Fourteen constitutions have been enacted since then, including the constitution of 1962, which was in effect during the tumultuous decade of the 1970s. The government, under the constitution of 1962, consisted of three branches - the executive, legislative, and judicial. Presidential terms were limited to five years and the chief executive could not be reelected to a second term. The executive branch was by far the most powerful branch of the government, as the actual power and influence of the president far exceeded that which was granted to him in the constitution. Control of the military and support of the oligarchy meant that the president could enforce, or ignore, any legislation or opposition. There were nine ministries in the cabinet. The most powerful two ministerial posts, defense and labor, were held by

military officers. Civilians headed the remaining seven, agriculture, public works, foreign affairs, finance, economy, health, and justice.⁴

The legislative branch consisted of a unicameral body, the Legislative Assembly, in which fifty-two deputies from El Salvador's fourteen districts were distributed proportionally based on the population. The Assembly had the power to elect the president and vice-president if no candidate received an absolute majority. Other powers included the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and appellate courts, selection of the members of the Central Electoral Council, and rejection of persons elected to the Assembly based on their credentials. The Assembly also had the power to amend the constitution.

The Supreme Court was the highest court and had judicial review over constitutional matters. There were eight courts of second instance and forty-four courts of first instance. The entire judicial system fell under the Attorney General.

⁴State Department, Background Notes, 154

Armed Forces

Since 1931, the structure of government, as outlined above, has been dominated by the oligarchy through the military. By the 1970s, the armed forces consisted of about 7000 men. The majority were in the Army, with about 1000 in the Air Force, and 200 in the Navy. The Navy had a coast guard-type mission and was equipped with small patrol boats. The Air Force had one squadron located at San Salvador with missions of troop and logistic transport. The military budget was \$48 million dollars in 1979, which amounted to 1.4 per cent of the gross national product.⁵

Military service was supposed to be compulsory in the 1970s; in practice, however, active duty units were made up of volunteers for several reasons. In El Salvador, as in many countries of Latin America, the military provided the opportunity for education, steady pay, and the possibility of improving one's social status. The pay and living conditions of the soldier were superior to that of the average worker or peasant. Literacy programs were available at each unit for soldiers. The officer corps was educated and commissioned at the national military academy. All officer candidates had at least four years of secondary education before application to the

⁵Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 87.

academy. Virtually all applicants were from rural villages and many of them were sponsored by plantation owners. Officers trained in branch schools had the possibility of selection for higher level military schooling on a competitive basis.

The military academy starts each year with a class of about 100 cadets, of which only about twenty are able to complete the physically and mentally rigorous course of instruction. Each graduating class from the military class is a tanda. Under this system, the class is promoted at the same time all the way through the ranks. Class standing follows officers throughout their careers and determines who gets what duty position. This is especially important for the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and above. Eventually, one of the tanda will be the Minister of Defense. The tanda system helps to develop a strong bond between the officers of each year group. Historian Richard Millet states that this prevents officers from prosecution for human rights violations, because of the protection they are afforded by the system.⁶ Also, the military does not operate through a distinct chain of command like the United States Army, rather, consensus

⁶Leiken, Robert S., ed., Central America: Anatomy Of Conflict (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), 74.

between tandas determines a course of action or policy that the military will support. Position in the tanda allows officers to make contacts with the oligarchy, allowing opportunities for increased financial and social status.

As in many countries of the world, the Salvadoran military establishment consisted of security forces, as well as the army, navy, and air force. The security forces in the 1970s consisted of the National Police, the National Guard, and the Treasury Police, together totalling about 2,500 men. All three organizations were subordinate to the Minister of National Defense and located in every district in the country. The National Police organization consisted of patrolmen, detectives, and traffic police. The National Police and National Guard were paramilitary organizations and all members, except detectives, wore military uniforms and insignia of rank. The National Guard was commanded by military officers and had a police type mission in the cities as well as the countryside. The Treasury Police, unarmed and usually accompanied by an armed member of the National Guard, were charged with controlling smuggling through the seaports and the airport.

Religion

When examining the political dynamics of El Salvador, it is necessary to look beyond the formal power vested in the military and oligarchy. The role of the Catholic Church must also be included. Roman Catholics compose approximately 81 percent of the population, Protestants about 10 percent. Spanish conquistadors introduced the Roman Catholic religion into the region. Subsequently, missionaries established schools and set about to convert the Indians to the Roman Catholic faith. Religion has played an important part throughout the history of El Salvador, even contributing to a change in government in 1844. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the Church has traditionally supported the government and the strong ruling class. In the 1970s, however, certain elements within the Church would become an ardent opponent of the government by taking an active role in trying to resolve the country's problems through substantive change.

Political Turmoil

Despite the constitutional foundations of government, El Salvador has had a succession of presidents, dictators, military officers, and more than 52 successful coups since the first constitution in 1841.⁷ The oligarchy maintained control of the presidency, through the military, until the first truly free elections in the country's history in 1931. The result of this election was that no candidate received a majority and the election was decided by the legislature. Arturo Araujo, a minority candidate whom the oligarchy felt they could control, was elected by an ad hoc coalition of students, labor activists, and the landowners who were adversely affected by the Great Depression. Araujo's attempts to institute reform and improve economic conditions counter to oligarchical interests resulted in his ouster by a military coup on 2 December 1931⁸.

General Maximiliano Hernández-Martínez, the Vice-President and Araujo's constitutional successor, was appointed president. At this time, Augustin Farabundo Martí, a leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, was

⁷ Baloyra, El Salvador, 186.

⁸ Ibid, 9.

organizing workers and peasants into a militant Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FRTS). The FRTS platform was to regain communal lands that were confiscated from the Indians and attain an eight-hour work day for all laborers. The members of the FRTS comprised several radical factions that included anarchists and Marxists.⁹ Failing any gains through the electoral process or through strikes, Martí planned an insurrection that would start with attacks against several towns and military barracks. The authorities learned of the plot and arrested Martí two days before the planned activities. Communication among other rebel leaders broke down, and the resulting disorganized attack by the peasants was easily put down. General Hernández was quick to take reprisals in what was to become known as the matanza (massacre). It is estimated that over 30,000 peasants, mostly Indian, were slaughtered by the Salvadoran army. The legislature abolished peasant unions, while Martí and the other rebel leaders were executed by firing squad.

In 1931, the oligarchy handed the reins of the government to the military in order to maintain hegemony over the governmental process. The two primary goals of the military since 1931 have been the preservation of

⁹Armstrong, Jack and Janet Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of Revolution (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 20.

the army as an institution and protection of the interests of the oligarchy.

As Tommie S. Montgomery states in The Roots of Revolution,

If before, forces of the oligarchy were thrown into the struggle for power, organizing more or less successful parties and electoral movements; exciting the masses; afterward the entire oligarchy withdrew from the political game in order to leave it to military tyranny. . . . In a Few words, political power passed, on December 2, 1931, into the hands of the army. That was transformed, in practice, into the great elector and into a type of political party permanently in arms.¹⁰

Elections were held every five years, but election fraud and severe repression ensured that the military's candidate was elected. The military gained control of counting the vote, thereby reinforcing institutionalized electoral fraud. The oligarchy controlled the military by influence and bribes. Any reform-minded president who managed to get elected invariably fell victim to a coup and was replaced by someone more conservative. Post-coup activities came to signify the repression of the group that was deposed by military means.

¹⁰Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 53.

Between 1931, and prior to 1979, El Salvador experienced several coups, the most recent occurring in October 1960 and January 1961. Growing repression and economic pressures precipitated the 1960 coup which ousted President Jose María Lemus. The coup was planned by General Oscar Osorio, a former president, and carried out by officers loyal to him. A junta of three officers and three civilians attempted to create a democratic climate and reduce the tensions in the country. The junta announced that truly free elections would be held and civilians would run the government. The second coup, a few months later, was led by officers from the San Carlos barracks who feared liberal reforms and civilian rule. Colonel Julio Alberto Rivera was appointed to lead the new junta. Colonel Rivera was elected president in December of 1961. Army officers continued to hold power, with the support of the oligarchy and by controlling the electoral process, until the coup in 1979. Elections, though questionable in their integrity, provided the facade which the military uses to legitimize their rule.

Conclusion

At the end of the 1960s, El Salvador was a country of have and have-nots. The oligarchy controlled the land and the government through the military. Discontent, in the form of strikes or demonstrations, was met with repression from the government. Opposition through the political process was limited because of military control of the voting process. We can see in the inability to affect reform using the political process and in the lack of opportunity for most of the people to improve their economic status the source for the increasing polarization of Salvadoran society.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL REVIEW

The Decade of the Seventies

El Salvador started the decade of the 1970s following a war with Honduras and ended with a coup that brought an end to almost forty years of rule by military presidents. During this period, several watershed events occurred that would change the lives of every citizen in the country. Fraudulent elections, increasing repression, and mobilization of the people to bring about reform through mass organizations, all intensified in the aftermath of the 1969 war with Honduras.

The Soccer War

During the 1960s, moderate reforms and significant economic growth mitigated some of the problems caused by overpopulation and unequal land distribution in El Salvador. The Central American Common Market provided trade between El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua that especially benefitted the agro-export industry of El Salvador. Considerable United States investment in small industrial enterprises resulted from the availability of cheap labor. Competition for jobs in these industries was intense because of the large population.¹ The competition would have been more intense except for the fact that for many years, El Salvador had an outlet for some of its surplus population across the border in Honduras.

By 1969, more than 300,00 Salvadoran peasants had emigrated into Honduras looking for farming plots large enough to sustain their families. Emigration was fairly easy because Honduras was sparsely populated, the Honduran government did not enforce the treaties limiting immigration, and the border with El Salvador was poorly defined. In April 1969, the Honduran

¹Schmidt, Steffen W., El Salvador: America's Next Vietnam (Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publications, 1983), 58-62.

government passed an agrarian reform bill that usurped land from all people who were not native born Hondurans. The enactment of this bill was due in part to the realization in Honduras that they imported a large volume of industrial goods from El Salvador, while exporting a small quantity of primary products. This trade imbalance financed Salvadoran industrial development, while the Honduran economy was backward and industrialization remained stagnate. Under the agrarian reform law, thousands of Salvadorans were forced to leave their small farms and homes and move back to El Salvador. The historical resentment between the two countries increased and, in June, Honduras closed her borders.²

President Sánchez of El Salvador was under pressure, because sharp declines in export prices were causing the small industries to lay off workers, thereby increasing pressure on the labor market already under strain from the people returning from Honduras. Strikes and demonstrations increased and the government responded with violence to suppress dissidence. Popular support of the government, based on the earlier reforms and economic growth, ebbed as internal tensions heightened. The people were looking for an outlet to vent their frustrations.

²Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 79-81. Armstrong and Shank, The Face of Revolution, 56.

In June 1969, at a series of World Cup soccer games between El Salvador and Honduras, riots broke out. There were charges and counter-charges between the two governments and the Honduran team withdrew from the competition. This aggravated tensions at the disputed and ill-defined border, across which both sides conducted cross-border raids. Full-scale military operations ensued when El Salvador attacked on 14 July. Initial air strikes on the airport at the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa caught most of the Honduran air force on the ground, while the Salvadoran army attack resulted in quickly occupying three Honduran towns. The Organization of American States negotiated a truce, but the political tensions, cost of the war, and the dissolution of the Central American Common Market, had economic ramifications on both sides. For its part, El Salvador expended one-fifth of its annual budget in four days.³ Despite this, President Sánchez was treated as hero because of the victory in the war. He used this status to great advantage to enhance the waning power of his party in the Legislative Assembly elections scheduled for March 1970.

³Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 81.

The Election of 1972

President Sánchez, elected by a narrow margin in 1967, continued the rule of the National Conciliation Party (PCN) that began in 1961. The PCN was the party that the oligarchy used to maintain the military presidents in power and to subvert any reform measures that would be against elite interests. Opposition from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and the Renovating Action Party (PAR) resulted in both parties making major gains in local elections and the Legislative Assembly in 1968. Both parties were slightly left of center, promising reforms in land distribution, and had the support of the lower classes and labor in the countryside. To counter this, Sánchez used his popular support after the Soccer War to enact land and education reform legislation over opposition from the oligarchy, while retaining his ability to control the political process. He felt his progressive policies would sustain popular support for the party and play a major part in the PCN winning back control of the legislature and most of the elected local positions in the municipalities which were lost in the 1970 election. Eventually, the oligarchy blocked the enforcement of the

legislation before it could effect any changes, while the defeat of the PDC and PAR at the polls convinced the opposition they had to do something different to have a chance at the 1972 presidential elections. Opposition parties were gaining popular support in municipal elections and hoped to make a strong showing in the 1972 presidential elections.

The coalition National Opposition Union (UNO) had every reason to believe it would win the presidential election in 1972. Formed in September 1971, UNO consisted of three centrist to moderately leftist parties - PDC, Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN), and National Revolutionary Movement (MNR).⁴ They nominated José Napoleón Duarte as their presidential candidate and Guillermo Manuel Ungo as the vice-presidential candidate. Duarte garnered fame and popularity as mayor of San Salvador from 1964-1972. His reforms and public works projects greatly aided the poor, which assisted his reelection as mayor and, eventually, his presidential bid in 1972. Ungo, a lawyer and son of one of the founders of the PDC, built a following among the industrial workers. Duarte campaigned for the presidency throughout the countryside with his

⁴Beloyra, El Salvador, 48.

running mate. The candidate of the incumbent PCN party, Colonel Arturo Molina, was hand picked by incumbent President Fidel Sánchez.

The PCN faced considerable odds in the election. Conservative members of the oligarchy, especially the landowners, supported a candidate they could control to prevent any reforms that would encroach on their interests. The candidate, Chele Medrano, had contacts with the oligarchy, right-wing paramilitary groups, and was a former commander of the National Guard. Medrano was fired as commander in December 1970 because of rumors he was plotting against the government.⁵ The people, faced with a choice between the failed reform policies of Molina, and the ultra-conservative Medrano, threw their support to Duarte and UNO.

The popular support of UNO pushed the Right into action in order to retain control of the presidency. Duarte's car was ambushed and the driver killed during a campaign trip in the country. Even though this assassination attempt failed, the PCN still held control of the election because the military was in charge of collecting and counting the ballots.

The February 1972 election was one of the worst cases of electoral fraud in Salvadoran history. Observers were in consensus that UNO won the election. The posting of election results was suspended after it became

⁵ibid, 46-47.

clear that UNO had taken the lead over the PCN. The election board pronounced Molina the winner and UNO immediately asked for a recount. The election board then announced that no candidate had a majority and the constitution dictated that the election must be decided by the National Assembly. Molina was promptly elected president, because the PCN held the majority of the seats based on the 1970 elections. UNO called on voters to deface their ballots in the municipal election that was held the following month. They hoped this maneuver would cause the municipal election to be nullified and draw attention to the fraud of the previous presidential election. The election board, despite a majority of defaced ballots, certified the municipal election.⁶

A group of military officers, disillusioned at the electoral fraud, revolted on 25 March 1972, one month after the PCN was declared the victor in the presidential race. Led by Colonel Benjamin Mejía, the officers entered the Presidential Residence (Casa Presidencial) and arrested President Sánchez. Mejía's followers took control of the country's communication network. Duarte joined the coup (some would say reluctantly) and made broadcasts supportive of the coup. The coup was

⁶Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 85.

quickly and brutally crushed by the National Guard and Air Force units. Duarte was arrested, beaten, and sent into exile.⁷

This revolt represented a dramatic shift in El Salvador. One-party domination had been the rule since 1932. The armed forces dominated an alliance that maintained economic hegemony for the oligarchy. This situation ensured electoral victory and, eventually, it hoped to attract larger sectors of the middle-class.⁸ The system was foiled by the ability of the UNO coalition to gain middle and lower-class support at the polls. The dissent and the military revolt made the succession from Sánchez to Molina difficult, as peasants in the countryside had made their voice felt at the polls and only to be summarily disappointed.⁹

The failure of the coup destroyed the new center that UNO created in Salvadoran politics as an intermediary between the Left and the Right. Because of the electoral fraud, the people had no hope of achieving power through elections. This left the question of what political role could be pursued in order to enhance opportunities for social and economic mobility.

⁷Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of Revolution, 121.

⁸Loveman, Brian and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. eds., The Politics of Antipolitics (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 285.

⁹Baloyra, El Salvador, 103.

Social organizations filled the vacuum for the masses, while the middle-class began to contemplate more drastic action.¹⁰

Opposition Movements

In the 1970s, student, teacher, and worker organizations began to form and protest. These groups generally had a political arm, a military arm, and a mass organization.¹¹ The organizations have split, formed splinter groups, and united under several titles. The following examples of some of the major organizations will serve to amplify this point. In 1974 the Christian Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FECCAS) joined the United Popular Action Front (FAPU). FAPU was a coalition of various church, labor, and professional organizations. The FAPU split in 1975, and the FECCAS aligned with the Revolutionary Popular Bloc (BPR). The BPR strategy was to organize strikes, land seizures, demonstrations, and protests. The BPR was aligned with the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the oldest and largest of

¹⁰ibid, 102.

¹¹ibid, 69.

the popular organizations.¹² This type of splintering became commonplace in the opposition organizations in the 1970s.

The Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP) presents a good example of the organizations that started at this time and of the problems they encountered. The ERP formed in 1971 from left-wing Christian Democrats disenchanted at pursuing reform through the electoral process. The founder, Joaquin Villalobos, stated that the ERP consisted of "different groups with different approaches to strategy, but sharing the want to promote armed struggle in El Salvador."¹³ The ERP conducted several kidnappings and military actions in the early 1970s in order to gain notoriety and amass money through ransoms. A rift grew in the organization between those who thought the time was right for an armed insurrection. Roque Dalton spoke for a different faction that wanted to build political organizations to complement the military element.¹⁴ Dalton's opposition in the party murdered him on May 10, 1975. The result was the isolation of the ERP until 1980.

¹²Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of Revolution, 87.

¹³Ibid, 66.

¹⁴Ibid, 67.

Also, a large group left the ERP to form the National Resistance (RN). The RN created a new organizational scheme by forming a subordinate armed force, called the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). The mass organization that supported the RN was the Popular Action Front (FAPU), a collection of students, labor unions, church groups, and teachers.¹⁵

Each of the above organizations represented a coalition of various groups with diverse ideologies. According to Enrique Baloyra, the FPL was composed primarily of workers, peasants, teachers, and students.¹⁶ The ideology of the leadership was Marxist-Leninist, but that does not mean that all members adhered to this ideology. Most of the rural organizations followed a radical Christian Democratic line. The FPL was the largest, most orthodox, and best organized of the coalitions.

The rise of the popular organizations was generally in response to repression by the military and the lack of a voice in politics. Violence increased from both sides with the Left conducting kidnappings of members of the oligarchy and bank robberies. The Right responded with actions such

¹⁵Ibid, 70.

¹⁶Baloyra, El Salvador, 66-67.

as the peasant massacre at La Cayetana in November 1974, where peasants had been involved in a land dispute with the neighboring land owner. The military and para-military entered the town where they killed six, arrested twenty-five, and thirteen peasants "disappeared."¹⁷ The polarization of Salvadoran society began to accelerate and was almost completed after the 1977 elections. The social disorder in El Salvador even spurred the Church into taking a stand.

The Church

The organization and awakening of the political conscience of the peasantry can be attributed, in part, to the Roman Catholic Church. Pope John XIII issued a statement after the Vatican Council II in 1965 that the church should go beyond spiritual education and emphasize the Church as a member of the community. The statement was followed by a conference in Medellin, Columbia in 1968, where the bishops of Latin America called upon the church to "defend the rights of the oppressed and denounce the unjust action of world powers that work against self-determination of weaker nations."¹⁸ The priests and catechists who went out into the small

¹⁷ Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

communities of El Salvador preached that the people were not condemned to poverty by God.

The Church was very active in the political process and dissension against the government. The people became politicized by the Catholic Church when priests and clerics went out to organize the peasants into Christian Base Communities (CEB). The purpose of the CEB's was to worship and study the Bible, bring the people together socially, and to promote working together and sharing responsibilities. This awakened the people to an awareness of their plight and led to their demand for agrarian reform, higher wages, and better working conditions. The Christian Federation of Salvadoran Rural Workers (FECCAS) was founded in 1964 by the Church as a self-help organization that emphasized communalism. The organization grew stronger and was spurred on by the agrarian reforms promised by President Molina in 1976 in order to stem the rising unrest in the countryside. Almost 61,000 hectares were to be nationalized in order to calm the rising tide of unrest. Minister of Defense Carlos Romero (chosen by Molina to be his successor as president) threatened a coup if the reforms

went through.¹⁹ The failure of the promised land reforms and repression from the military during strikes and demonstrations served to radicalize the FECCAS. The response of the oligarchy was to blame the priests for organizing the people against the government. Several priests were tortured and killed and many were expelled from the country. The repression of priests caused the Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero, to become an outspoken critic of the government.

Archbishop Romero's weekly mass was broadcast on YSAX, the Church's radio station and became the most listened to program in El Salvador. The Archbishop would not only read scripture, he would read a list of government and death squad attacks. He would also comment on current political topics. The Right perceived that the effect of his messages was to mobilize the people against the government violence and countered his messages with bombing attacks on the radio station. The Church is credited with eroding what little legitimacy the government still possessed.²⁰ Archbishop Romero had contacts with all strata of the political spectrum in El Salvador.

¹⁹Ibid, 90.

²⁰Beloyra, El Salvador, 103.

Death Squads

Of the several "death squads" that were formed by the National Guard and the oligarchy to suppress strikes and demonstrations, the most famous was the National Democratic Organization known as ORDEN (orden is the Spanish word for order). ORDEN controlled elections by stuffing ballot boxes and transporting them to be counted. Another such group, FALANGE (Anti-Communist Armed Forces of Liberation by Wars of Elimination) first appeared in August 1975, threatening to kill all Communists and their sympathizers. In 1977 the UGB or White Warriors Union, was credited with killing a Catholic priest and broadcasting a threat to kill any Jesuit. Priests were a target because of their influence in organizing peasants. This threat brought a strong reaction from the United States, France, Mexico, and Venezuela. The right-wing death squads were known to be supported by the oligarchy and included members from the National Guard, Treasury Police, as well as mercenaries.²¹

²¹ *ibid.*, 89.

Between January and July 1977 two priests were killed, two tortured, one beaten, two imprisoned, and four threatened with death.²² Organizers of the peasants became recurrent targets, and the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande on 17 March 1977 had significant implications for both sides. Grande was instrumental in organizing rural workers, especially in the Aguilares district. He had been threatened several times by right-wing death squads for his activities. Following his assassination, the army moved into the area and killed every peasant that was suspected of being sympathetic to Grande. The result was at least 50 dead and hundreds more missing. Several hundred others were crowded into jails while the army occupied the area for over a month. The White Warriors Union began distributing pamphlets declaring "Be a Patriot. Kill a Priest."²³ The resulting international outcry brought attention to the deteriorating situation in the country. The above incidents, and others, promoted and shaped the formation of opposition groups.

²²Baloyra, El Salvador, 94.

²³Armstrong and Sherk, The Face of Revolution, 126.

TABLE 1

Political Violence in El Salvador, 1972-1979

<u>Categories by President</u>	<u>Molina</u> 1972-77	<u>Romero</u> 1977-79
<u>Initiated by the government:</u>		
Political assassinations	37	461
Wounded by security forces	78	88
Prosecuted for political offense	114	477
"Disappeared"	69	131
Other terrorist acts	9	15
Priests killed	2	4
<u>Initiated by the guerrillas:</u>		
Attacks	31	60
Killings of security personnel	24	58
Killings of paramilitary personnel	18	74
Wounded in guerrilla attacks	11	14
Kidnappings	8	16

Source: Enrique Baloyra, El Salvador in Transition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 186.

The increased level of violence on both sides pushed the nation into severe economic and social distress. A flight of capital ensued as the oligarchy pulled money out of Salvadoran banks and made deposits in banks out of the country. The level of stress in the nation became another contributing factor to the motives of the reformers who would soon begin plotting a coup against the government.

The Election of 1977

General Carlos Humberto Romero was nominated by the ruling PCN party to succeed Molina as president. Romero was the Defense Minister under Molina and gained favor with the oligarchy because of his handling of unrest in the countryside. The oligarchy allied with the extreme Right to prevent even the modest land reforms of Molina and saw Romero as their man to maintain the status quo.²⁴ The months preceding the election heightened the tensions in El Salvador. The results of the election, however, ignited the fire.

The PCN won the election as the result of blatant fraud in the vote counting. After the election, crowds estimated at up to 50,000 converged on the Plaza Libertad in downtown San Salvador. They listened to speakers denouncing the fraudulent election. The night of 28 February 1977 the Army, National Guard, Customs Police, and Treasury Police surrounded the plaza. The massacre that ensued resulted in fifty to one hundred killed. The bodies were quickly "disposed of" and the plaza hosed clean of blood. The next morning, there were no signs of a massacre. This incident hardened the

²⁴Montgomery, Origins and Evolution 90.

growing conviction that the oligarchy and military would never yield power willingly.²⁵

This sentiment was enhanced by the passage of the Public Order Law. This law made illegal what most United States citizens consider to be basic freedoms of expression. It imposed press censorship, banned public meetings, outlawed strikes, made it a crime to disseminate information that tended to destroy social order, and suspended normal judicial procedures for such offenses.²⁶ These actions, combined with the fraudulent election and increasing death squad violence, added to the factors in the decision of military officers to attempt a reformist coup.

The 1979 Coup

Several of the considerations that influenced the decision to attempt a coup came from current events. The 1979 revolution in Nicaragua caused many officers of Somoza's National Guard to flee through El Salvador enroute to exile in various countries. These officers lost everything: their

²⁵Armstrong and Sherk, The Face of Revolution, 188-89.

²⁶Loveman and Davies, The Politics of Antipolitics, 285.

money, their homes, and their country. The threat of revolution in El Salvador caused Army officers to fear the same losses as their counterparts in Nicaragua.

Meanwhile, the repression by the Salvadoran National Guard and the death squads was seen by its victims as parallel to the situation in Nicaragua and became intolerable. On 9 May 1979, the National Guard opened fire on about one hundred demonstrators in front of a cathedral. Twenty-three of the unarmed demonstrators were killed. The scene was witnessed by other opposition groups and foreign news correspondents. These two events, the Nicaraguan revolution and the church massacre, coupled with the deteriorating economy led two brothers, Salvadoran army Lieutenant Colonels Rodrigo and Rene Guerra y Guerra to action. Their goal was to restore a legitimate government to power by eliminating the threat of the death squads, increasing the standard of living of the people, distributing the land equitably, and restoring the failing economy.

The Guerra brothers were engineers who had attended college and graduate school in the United States.²⁷ President Carlos Humberto Romero once mentioned to a friend that Rene Guerra was one of the best and

²⁷Except where noted, the information on the coup is from Montgomery's El Salvador: Origins and Evolution.

brightest officers in the Salvadoran Army. Unlike the majority of the officers in the Salvadoran Army who came from lower middle class origins, these brothers were from the upper middle class.

The Guerras met with a number of influential civilians, such as a relative of theirs in the National Assembly, to convince them to have President Romero resign. They were unsuccessful in this venture because of the danger inherent in such an operation and proceeded with plotting the coup. The first step was to identify progressive young officers who would support them.

Recruiting began in August 1979. This was done slowly and carefully to ensure the true loyalty of the officers being recruited. A captain or lieutenant from each barracks was eventually selected. The chosen officer would recruit other junior officers in his unit and be responsible for the arrest of the commanding officer of the barracks on the morning of the coup. A coordinating committee recruited officers from the higher ranks. This was also done very secretly and selectively to maintain security. Rene Guerra began to meet regularly with Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador. The support of the Archbishop helped to legitimize the coup and gain the support of the masses.

Support from the civilian sector was deemed critical to initiate envisioned social and economic reforms.²⁸

Three prominent civilians were chosen to become members of the post-coup junta. Román Mayorga-Quiroz was a political independent, rector of the Jesuit-run Catholic University, and had written a popular book arguing for social and economic reforms. His work was known and respected by many of the younger officers and the people. Mario Andino, a businessman, was selected after consultation with the business community. The third member selected was Guillermo Ungo, a Social Democrat from the Popular Forum. The inclusion of Ungo, who had run for vice-president behind Duarte in 1972, was necessary to consolidate support for the junta because he provided a strong progressive presence

The eventual military chief of the junta was let into the coup plot against the wishes of Rene Guerra. Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez was the commander of the army's communications repair facility, with ties to the oligarchy. The communications repair facility was part of ANTEL, the government owned telecommunications company. Gutiérrez uncovered the coup plot and was admitted to the planning committee to keep him quiet.

²⁸Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 11.

Rene Guerra and Colonel Adolfo Majano were elected by the planning committee to be the military members of the junta. The next day, Gutiérrez called a meeting and challenged the election of Guerra on the grounds that he was too junior to head the junta. Rene Guerra was infuriated with Gutiérrez and went to Archbishop Romero and told him he was quitting the coup plot. Archbishop Romero convinced Guerra to remain in order to provide a stabilizing force against older and more conservative officers, such as Gutiérrez.

There was considerable debate as to the exact date to initiate the coup. One group wanted to wait until after a meeting of the Organization of American States that was scheduled for 20 October. El Salvador would be condemned at this meeting for its human rights violations, thus providing a legitimizing factor to the coup in international public opinion. The decision to wait until after the meeting was changed at the last minute.

Two senior officers uncovered the plot and relayed their information to President Romero. The president and the military staff gathered at the Presidential Residence, which contains the official offices of the president. They waited there for two days and nights and then decided to go home when there was no activity. The coup plotters knew they

had to act soon because of their discovery, but waited until President Romero had gotten over his initial panic. Nine Air Force officers were erroneously identified as coup plotters. Two were arrested and the rest hid from the police. The identification of these officers, albeit mistakenly, helped to allay the fears of the President.

The coup was rescheduled to begin at 6:00 a.m., 15 October 1979. The plot called for a junior officer at each of the fourteen military barracks to awaken the commander and announce that he was under arrest and that President Romero had been ousted by a coup. Once the barracks were secured, a call would be placed to the coup command center in San Salvador. The telephone lines were controlled by Gutiérrez' friends at ANTEL. The plotters had done such a good job of keeping the identity of the senior coup sympathizers a secret that calls had to be made to the command center to determine who were the "good guys" and who were the "bad guys."

After ensuring the barracks were secure, Colonel Gutiérrez called President Romero and the High Command. Gutiérrez informed the President that he was no longer in power and demanded that the Minister and Subsecretary of Defense, the Secretary to the President, and the

commanders of the National Guard, National Police, and Treasury Police leave the country. Gutiérrez told them they would be allowed safe conduct if they left the country by 3:00 p.m. The coup plotters had thus eliminated the possibility of any armed opposition to the takeover by any government force. The President went to the National Guard for help, but they were neutral and waiting for the outcome. There are two possible explanations for ignoring the President's call for assistance. One is that the coup plotters either controlled or co-opted all key military units. The other is that the commander's of these units were waiting to determine the outcome of the coup. Both explanations are at least partially true, depending upon the unit that is examined. At any rate, President Romero and his cabinet left the country that day for Guatemala after a bloodless coup.

Military officers and left-wing groups were not the only ones seeking a change in government. The coup leaders also consulted the Catholic Church and the United States Embassy. The official position of the United States in regard to the coup was one of neutrality. The ambassador had been approached by Rene Guerra about support for the coup. The ambassador stated he would neither support nor try to block the coup.²⁹ A similar response was given by the military attache. The United States

²⁹Ibid, 15.

quickly recognized the new government, reinstated economic and military aid, and pressed the new government for reform. Two primary concerns of the United States were the quelling of the Communist insurgency in light of recent events in Nicaragua and the end to human rights abuses. The initial proclamation of the junta was welcomed by all, but there was serious doubt as to whether these new players in the political arena had the ability to overcome the resistance of the right-wing military leaders.

Conclusion

For all intents and purposes, El Salvador going into 1979 was a one party state. Though several opposition parties existed, they were prevented from achieving national power through electoral fraud. The elections of 1977 were fraught with fraud and outright repression. The minority parties were able to gain several seats in the National Assembly and their power threatened the incumbent regime. The lack of opposition parties to counter the power of military presidents contributed to the unrest in the country.

When reforms, could not be implemented through legislative action, the opposition elements were left with little recourse except to take extra-legal measures.

The 1979 coup in El Salvador was a bloodless, well-executed coup. There was no cause to roll tanks or troops into the capital because the opposition had been neutralized. The plot was kept secret from President Romero and most of the officers who would be in opposition to the coup. Even when compromised, the coup plotters were able to overcome the revelation of their planned actions by including those officers in the plot. Corporate motives were present in wanting to end the corruption in the army and gain respect as a professional organization. The oligarchy had invaded the sanctity of the officer corps through bribes and backing various struggles for power. The government lost its legitimacy with the people and opposition organizations through repression, refusal to allow reforms in the electoral process, agrarian policies, and economic policies. The increase in violence by both the government and the left-wing factions further destabilized the regime. Amidst this backdrop came the need for a centrist government that could control the military, initiate reforms, and

prevent revolution. The path to this new government and the reaction of the people will be shown in following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

THE JUNTAS AND THE ELECTION OF 1982

Reformism Under a State of Seige¹

The first junta established after the October 1979 coup announced reforms that might have satisfied virtually all dissident groups in El Salvador. It promised to enact political, economic, and land reforms, to locate the persons who had disappeared at the hands of the government, and to eliminate the death squads. The composition of the junta was promising, with three civilians representing the center and the left, and two army officers representing the reformist faction of the military. By any measure, this combination of a reformist and centrist junta should have brought El Salvador a moderate government with the chance of staving off a revolution.

¹ Baloyra, Enrique, El Salvador in Transition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 104.

Despite the outlook for harmony and reform, there was some apprehension from factions outside the reformist military.

The First Junta

The record of the military's repression and the military's alignment with the oligarchy created hesitation by the popular organizations in joining the junta. Lack of voice in participatory politics, due to the electoral fraud perpetrated by the military since 1972, added to the sense of distrust. Guillermo Manuel Ungo, the representative of the Popular Forum (FP), called his decision to join the junta "a risk that had to be taken. It was the last possibility for peaceful change."² Ungo brought the FP platform to the junta that asked for:

No more repression; dissolution of ORDEN, FALANGE, UGB and Mano Blanca {all right-wing paramilitary organizations}.

Inclusionary political participation and ideological pluralism; effective freedom of organization; recognition of the right to strike.

²Baloyra, El Salvador, 87.

Short-term economic measures to stop inflation, improve wages; control of prices of articles of popular consumption; rent control.

'Long-term economic measures guaranteeing access of peasants to the ownership and use of land.

Inauguration of a democratic regime before elections.

Effective participation of the popular organizations to guarantee a process of real democratization and the consolidation of a new political regime.³

For its part, the junta announced reforms very much along these lines. A summary of the main points follows:

I. Cease the violence and corruption {dissolve ORDEN}.

II. Guarantee the existence of human rights {free elections, political parties of all ideologies, amnesty to political prisoners, right of labor to organize, and freedom of speech}.

III. Adopt measures which will lead to an equitable distribution of the national wealth, increasing, at the same time, in an accelerated fashion, the gross national product {agrarian

³Armstrong, Robert and Janet Shenk, El Salvador: The Face of a Revolution (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 121.

reform, financial reform, consumer protection, and increased production}

IV. Channel, in a positive fashion, the foreign relations of the country {establish and strengthen relations with other Central American countries and countries that support the junta}⁴

As can be readily seen, these two platforms are very similar. By bringing the representation of the popular organizations into the coalition, the junta hoped to legitimize its programs. However, the reforms proclaimed by the junta should be viewed with a bit of caution. Like any reformist political organization, they were trying to gain as much support from as many different sources as possible.

The junta issued several decrees in support of its reform programs. Decree 9 created a special committee to investigate the "disappeared," Decree 12 was the order to disband ORDEN, and Decree 14 increased the minimum wage of day laborers in an attempt to stimulate the economy and demonstrate the support of the junta for the peasant. Decree 43 froze all landholdings over 100 hectares until an agrarian reform bill could be enacted. That bill came in February 1980 in the form of Decree 153 which

⁴Loveman, Brian and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. eds., The Politics of Antipolitics (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 285.

provided for freezing all land holdings over 500 hectares, thus affecting 25 percent of the land, which was controlled by 244 landowners.⁵ This would have affected the large coffee and cotton plantations in the country. Eventually, no action was taken on this attempt at agrarian reform. Decree 158 nationalized the banking industry and, unlike the agrarian reform, was enforced.⁶

The announcement of the reforms was initially greeted with apprehension by both the Left and the Right. The Left, for the most part, wanted to see if the new government could make good on its promises. As Joaquin Villalobos stated, "Our history is full of military coups led by people who at first adopt the platform of the people before allowing things to go back to the way they have always been."⁷ This expresses the anxiety of the Left over the promises for reform and representative government. The military, for its part, was undergoing problems of its own during the first junta. The reaction of the Right to the reform programs was to increase violence against the Left. Tommie S. Montgomery in her book Revolution in El Salvador asserts that this move to rightist repression

⁵Beloyra, El Salvador, 90-91.

⁶Ibid., 101

⁷Armstrong and Sherk, The Face of a Revolution, 120.

followed the pattern of the "progressive victories" in El Salvador, namely in 1944, 1948, 1960, and 1972. She postulates that repression increases when the military as an institution (not the reformist minority) feels threatened as an institution and then resorts to violence to maintain its status as a powerful institution and influence on the government.⁸ As will be seen, the same general pattern would hold true in 1979. The consolidation and increased militancy of the Left was a reaction to the failures of the reforms and the increased repression from the military and the death squads.

The first junta could not fulfill its promise to dissolve ORDEN. ORDEN was composed of thousands of armed people in the country who supported the security forces in controlling dissident organizations. The junta got no cooperation from the old line officers in the security organizations and the officers on the junta were too junior to exert command influence.⁹ Local commanders of the national guard (generally considered to control ORDEN in the country) served the interests of the landowners and used violence and intimidation to maintain the status

⁸Tommie Sue Montgomery, Revolution in El Salvador. Origins and Evolution (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 159.

⁹Baloyra, El Salvador, 91. Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 160.

quo.¹⁰ As a reporter stated when he saw members of the national guard delivering a payroll of one of the fincas (coffee plantations):

I knew of the close relationship between the National Guard and the landowners, but I couldn't help asking him if he didn't find such a system unusual. The landowner responded, I suppose you're right, . . . but that's the way it has always been here.¹¹

Even though ORDEN was outlawed, the government never confiscated any arms from the thousands of members.¹² The subject of the "disappeared" met with a similar fate. The "disappeared" was one of the most explosive issues that faced the first junta. During the 1970s, many persons were taken away by the military and the death squads, and the families of these people did not know whether the "disappeared" were dead or in jail. An example of the problem is the fate of Lili Milagro. She was captured on 26 November 1976 and subsequently tortured, raped, and starved. Rumor has it that she was killed the day after the coup to cover the brutal story of her treatment.¹³

¹⁰Ibid, 91.

¹¹Ibid, 201.

¹²Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of a Revolution, 126.

¹³Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 122-124.

The failure of the junta to resolve the issue of the "disappeared" was not entirely its fault. The security forces would not cooperate because they were the ones who had committed the abuses. A rift between elements in the military over the "disappeared" could have caused an irrevocable breach within the armed forces if the junta pressed the issue too far. The military and the paramilitary used any demonstration or protest as an excuse for their violent acts of retribution. One reaction of the Right to the reforms, specifically the effort to find the "disappeared", resulted in the assassination of Attorney General Mario Zamora. Mario was the brother of Ruben Zamora, a member of the first junta. Mario's efforts to energize the investigation of the "disappeared" resulted in his assassination at the hands of a death squad.¹⁴ The inability of the junta to show any progress in the plight of the "disappeared" demonstrated to the Left that the moderates were not in charge.

In fact, the level of repression after the coup increased over the level of that during Romero's regime.¹⁵ On 16 October 1979, the day after the coup, 78 striking factory workers were arrested (strikes were illegal

¹⁴Ibid, 99.

¹⁵Beloyra, El Salvador, 92.

under the Public Order Law). The military killed 18 of the workers. The next day the military, with tanks and helicopters, attacked a section of town that was under ERP control, killing 24 people.¹⁶ Amnesty International reported that the week after the coup there were over 100 killings of striking workers occupying farms and factories.¹⁷ The death toll continued to rise. Between 1 January and 13 March 1980, there were 689 political assassinations.¹⁸

It must be remembered that the overthrow of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua was fresh in the minds of the Right and the Left. The anti-Communist sentiment of "No More Nicaraguas" was present in the minds of both the United States and the military of El Salvador. The elimination of a Communist threat was used in many cases as an excuse for repression of anyone or anything that opposed the military methods or the political status quo.

As the repression mounted, the military experienced problems of its own during the first junta. The Permanent Council of the Armed Forces

¹⁶Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of a Revolution, 120.

¹⁷Amnesty International, "Report on El Salvador," in Amnesty International Report 1980 (London: AI Publications, 1980), 133.

¹⁸Baloyra, El Salvador, 100.

(COPEFA), established just after the coup, was a committee of officers which represented all officers of the armed forces and served as a mechanism of consultation on major policy issues and to monitor the junta's programs.¹⁹ COPEFA received a letter on 28 December 1979 from government ministers, the Supreme Court, and directors of state enterprises asking for a clear definition of the anti-oligarchic objectives of the junta and a halt to the repression aimed exclusively at the Left.²⁰ The letter also asked for COPEFA to assume the leadership of the junta in order to gain control of the military and Defense Minister José Guillermo García.

García, unlike the members of the junta, was not a reformer and used the military to suppress demonstrations. The military and paramilitary in the countryside were determined not to let the Left gain any advantage from land reform. García had extensive control of the military because he controlled promotions and the assignment of all officers in the military.²¹ With these abilities, García effectively used the military to stymie the junta and exacerbate the political tensions of the country.

¹⁹ Baloyra, El Salvador, 94.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 92.

COPEFA declined to intervene in what it termed as a purely political matter.²² This is in contradiction to one of the purposes of the organization: to ensure the reforms proclaimed by the junta were carried out. The letter stated in part that, "The minister of defense (Colonel García) and some of the regional commanders are exercising power against the postulates of the military youth movement."²³ Montgomery states that almost two hundred members of the officer corps met secretly in January to demand the resignation of García and his deputy.²⁴ The inability of the young officers in the junta to influence the power of García was beginning to take its toll. On 3 January, the struggle of the within the armed forces between reformers and García, the failure to implement reforms, and the increasing repression from the Right caused an accumulation of crises, culminating in the resignation of the three civilian members of the junta, along with the majority of the cabinet.

The first junta was unsuccessful at finding the whereabouts of the "disappeared," dissolving ORDEN, or implementing the announced land reforms. Ungo and Mayorga resigned from the junta because Defense

²²Ibid, 95.

²³Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of a Revolution, 129.

²⁴Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 160.

Minister García refused to tender his resignation.²⁵ Implementation of the land reform decrees was blocked by the death squads. The decree to increase wages was implemented, but this was woefully inadequate to have any impact on the economy.

The Second Junta

The military involved in the first junta established a second junta and invited the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) to participate. Jose Napoleon Duarte, former presidential candidate of the party, was not yet ready to take part in the junta, but the three civilian seats on the junta went to members of the PDC. Héctor Dada, foreign minister in the first junta, José Antonio Morales Erlich, Secretary General of the PDC, and Ramón Avalos Navarrete, a moderate and a physician, were sworn in to office on 9 January 1980.²⁶ The military members, Colonels Majano and Gutiérrez, remained from the first junta.

The PDC was recognized as the most center of all of the political parties in El Salvador. However, the party had lost much of its mass appeal

²⁵Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of a Revolution, 130.

²⁶Ibid, 103-131.

and backing due to the lack of political participation and defection of many members to join the popular organizations. This weakened its position in dealing with the conservatives in the military and the oligarchy. The addition of the PDC to the junta however, was heavily backed by the United States. Pressure from the United States helped the PDC make the military promise to commit itself to economic reforms, cease the repression, and commit to dialogue with the popular organizations. Yet despite this pressure, the junta still did not have control over the military or the death squads. The level of violence did not abate, and the Left began to unify some of the disparate organizations.

The Revolutionary Coordinating Committee (CRM) came into being on 11 January 1980 and represented four different organizations -- the Popular Revolutionary Bloque (BPR), the United People's Action Front (FAPU), the People's Leagues-28th of February (LP-28), and the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN).²⁷ The leadership of the CRM called for a march on 22 January that would commemorate the matanza of 1932. Thousands gathered in the capital city of San Salvador to participate in the march toward Cathedral

²⁷Ibid, 133. Baloyra, El Salvador, 78.

Square. As they entered the square, the National Guard opened fire.²⁸ Estimates of the casualties from the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission state that there were 67 killed and 250 wounded.²⁹ The violence from the Right demonstrated once again that they would tolerate no organized opposition from the Left.

The problems of the junta came not only from the Rights repression of the Left; there were also elements plotting against the junta. The aforementioned assassination of Mario Zamora occurred on 25 February 1980. Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, a leader of the ultra-right death squad White Warriors Union (UGB), had gone on radio denouncing Zamora as a member of the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL). D'Aubuisson was a vocal critic of reform and would later be implicated in a plot to overthrow the junta. The killing of Zamora occurred with full support of the Right, and the failure of the military to control the violence precipitated the resignation of Héctor Dada and the fall of the second junta on 3 March 1980.

The second junta was weakened by the level of repression from the Right and issued no new decrees. With the level of violence so high, it was not even able to enforce the decrees already enacted.

²⁸Armstrong and Sherk, The Face of A Revolution, 135.

²⁹Ibid, 136.

The Third Junta

The third junta brought Duarte to the front of politics in El Salvador and with him hope that a centrist solution to the problems could be found. Duarte was a powerful figure in the PDC and had heavy support from the United States. He was seen as the one man who could overcome the intransigence of the Right and bring the Left into the political arena. The junta set about to implement land and banking reforms, but the reform decrees were accompanied by a declaration of a state of siege, which suspended all constitutional guarantees for thirty days. Enrique Baloyra calls this the unofficial declaration of a state of civil war because the suspension lasted for over a year and, instead of speeding the implementation of reforms, was used by the military to block reforms.³⁰ The violence continued to mount on both sides and is accentuated with the assassination of the Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Arnulfo Romero which produced protest from the Left and repression from the Right.

Archbishop Romero was shot by an unknown assassin while saying mass on 24 March 1980. He had often used his homilies, broadcast by radio

³⁰Baloyra, El Salvador, 101.

all over the nation, to condemn the violence and read off lists of people who had "disappeared." Archbishop Romero had tried to remain out of the struggle between the Left and the Right, but the increasing level of violence forced him to take a stand. As was all too common in El Salvador, the assassin was never found. Many suspected that D'Aubisson, who had ties with several of the death squads, was the perpetrator of the crime. Condemnation of the slaying came from all over the world, including the United States. A crowd estimated at over eighty thousand gathered to mourn his death the day after the assassination. There were reports of bombs exploding, and there was definitely gunfire. When the shooting ended, there were over 20 dead and 200 wounded. Duarte and the government denied any involvement, but there is little doubt that the military and probably the extremists from the Right were to blame.³¹ The judge in charge of the investigation of Romero's murder, Atilio Ramírez, fled the country after narrowly escaping an assassination attempt.³²

The land reform issue also increased the level of repression as the oligarchy attempted to stave off its implementation. However, the

³¹Armstrong and Shank, The Face of a Revolution, 151. Baloyra, El Salvador, 100. Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 115, 133.

³²Baloyra, El Salvador, 100.

oligarchy was politically weakened by the freezing of the land assets. This, coupled with the effective nationalization of the banks and the nationalization of the coffee trade, further eroded the power of the oligarchy.³³ Control of the banks was a traditional means by which the oligarchy controlled the economy of El Salvador. They controlled the flow of money and who did and did not get loans. This power helped entrench them as the economic leaders in the nation. The enactment of these decrees struck a blow at the power of the oligarchy, but their alignment with the anti-reformist faction of the military sustained them as the ultimate authority in El Salvador.

The Left was isolated from politics after the first junta. The resignation of Unzueta, Zamora, and Mayorga took the popular organizations out of the legal political scene. The increased repression from the Right forced the ideologically disparate groups to form the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) as the political arm and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) as the military arm. The level of violence stimulated the FDR/FMLN to arm and fight an insurgency to overthrow the government. They

³³Ibid, 103.

felt that this was the only way to eliminate the repression and bring about reform.

The FDR formed on 1 April 1980, the week after Archbishop Romero was assassinated. The FDR provided unity to groups from the moderate-center to the far left. Included in the organization was the Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses (CRM) and the Democratic Front (FD).³⁴ These organizations served to unite social democratic political groups, professionals, technicians, labor unions, students, and others. Most important were the nationally known leaders who were former members of the government. Guillermo Ungo represented the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR). He was a member of the first junta and Duarte's running mate in 1972. Roman Mayorga was also in the first junta. Ruben Zamora was minister of the presidency in the second junta. Enrique Alvarez, former Minister of Agriculture, was elected as Secretary General. Alvarez stated the goals of the FDR as follows:

³⁴Ibid, 154.

to create and develop a national government that is both anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist and whose policy is based on: the broadest pluralistic participation of the people in the management of government, the strict respect for human rights, the right of self-determination,....a mixed economy which protects small and medium sized businesses, new regulations....concerning foreign investments which will take the national interest into account.³⁵

The formation of the FDR demonstrated a solidarity in the opposition that was unknown at the time. The opposition also began to garner international support and recognition through the FDR. France and Mexico recognized the FDR as a *legitimate political party* and called for a negotiations over the problems in El Salvador. Mexico's President Jose López Portillo permitted the FDR to establish political offices in his country.³⁶ The government was in for even more concern when the Unified Revolutionary Direction (DRU) formed on 22 May 1980.

The DRU was recognized by the FDR as the military arm of the revolution. The DRU in turn recognized the FDR as representing the forces

³⁵Ibid, 154.

³⁶Dunkerley, James, The Long War. Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador (London: Junction Books, 1983), 117.

that would bring a new government to El Salvador.³⁷ The formation of the DRU did not, however, bring unity to the ideologically disparate popular organizations. The DRU acted as the coordinating committee between the FDR and FMLN (formed in December 1980) with representatives from each of the major subordinate organizations. However, there were too many differences between the groups that had recently formed from the Salvadoran masses.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 216.

TABLE 2
ORGANIZATION OF THE LEFT IN EL SALVADOR

<u>Political-Military Organization</u>	<u>Mass Organization</u>	<u>Armed Forces</u>
Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL)	Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR)	Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL)
National Resistance (RN)	United Popular Action Front (FAPU)	Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN)
Party of the Salvadoran Revolution (PRS)	28th of February Popular Leagues (LP-28)	Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP)
Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS)	Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN)	Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL)
Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC)	Popular Liberation Movement (MLP)	Revolutionary Party of Central Workers (PRTC)

Source: Tommie S. Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador, Origins and Evolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 124.

Each of the above organizations represented a coalition of various groups with diverse ideologies. According to Baloyra, the FPL was composed primarily of workers, peasants, teachers, and students.³⁸ The ideology of leadership was Marxist-Leninist, but that does not mean that all members adhered to this ideology. Most of the rural organizations followed a radical Christian Democratic line. The FPL was the largest, most orthodox, and best organized of the coalitions.

The level of indoctrination of the masses into Marxist - Leninist ideology is unclear. The revolutionary masses may have an even stronger motive for their struggle - the end of repression and land of their own. The fight for one's survival can be stronger than the words of a dead Russian.

The ability of the revolutionary organizations to structure the lives of its members is questionable. Latin American scholars attribute the strength of the rural guerrillas to the need of the average peasant to be protected from the military and para-military. There are also thousands of refugees in the country that were forced out of their homes by the fighting. The guerrillas provided these people with a reasonable amount of security. There was no doubt as to the military capabilities of the guerrillas, but the

³⁸Ibid, 102.

mass popular support was not present in the magnitude required to overthrow the government.

The rise of the popular organizations was generally in response to repression by the military and the lack of a political voice in the vote. Ungo, Cordova, and others joining the opposition is further evidence of the polarization of politics in El Salvador. The stated goals of the FDR included a pluralist government, unrestricted participation in the political process, respect for human rights, a non-repressive army, a mixed economy, and nonalignment.³⁹ The successes and failures of the government and the opposition in bringing change to the people of El Salvador would affect the country for many years.

The Constituent Election of 1982

The constituent election of 1982, followed the next year by a presidential election, was pushed by the third junta as the first step in the democratization of El Salvador and bringing a sense of normality to the country which was in the throes of guerrilla warfare from the Left and

³⁹Baloyra, El Salvador, 154.

uncontrolled repression from the Right. The United States exerted considerable pressure on the junta to hold elections in order to meet conditions set by the United States Congress to continue military aid. There quickly emerged four major contending political parties out of the eight which ended up on the ballot. As Enrique Baloyra states, "Salvadorans had a clear-cut choice between the anti-Communist, hard-line, and laissez faire approach of ARENA {Nationalist Republican Alliance} and the reformist, incremental, and communitarian approach of the PDC."⁴⁰ Besides ARENA, the Party of National Conciliation (PCN) and the Democratic Action parties became major contenders for seats in the Assembly.

José Duarte was head of the third junta and the PDC. Uncontrolled repression from the death squads and a deteriorating economy made the PDC vulnerable to attacks from the opposition parties. Depressed export prices, the destruction caused by fighting the FMLN, and the flight of capital from the country since the 1979 coup, caused the destabilization of the economy.⁴¹ Opposition parties used this and the inability of the PDC to control the violence from the death squads as a campaign issue. This was despite the fact that the PDC was also a victim of the violence, sixty of

⁴⁰ Ibid, 170.

⁴¹ Ibid, 169.

their mayors and other officials assassinated during 1981. The stiffest opposition to the PDC came from ARENA.

Robert D'Aubuisson formed ARENA in November 1981 with the promise that if he were elected, the FMLN would be eliminated in three months.⁴² Along with this, he promised to roll back the modest reforms of the juntas and to try Duarte for treason.⁴³ D'Aubuisson claimed that the reforms of the PDC and the the Communist guerrillas were tearing the country apart.⁴⁴ D'Aubuisson campaigned with vigor in every province of the country, drawing large crowds. Monetary support for the party came from hard-line oligarchs who wanted to eliminate reforms and the guerrillas. This stance took support away from the PCN, which took a more moderate approach.

The PCN was the official party before the 1979 coup and had retained much of its political machine. Initially, the PCN was the strongest contender against the PDC, but the assassination of its secretary general in January 1982 eliminated it from serious contention.⁴⁵ No one ever

⁴²Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 185.

⁴³Ibid, 187.

⁴⁴Schmidt, Steffen W., El Salvador - America's Next Vietnam? (Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publications, 1983), 171.

⁴⁵Ibid, 186.

accused the FMLN of the murder because it was generally assumed to be a death squad attack.⁴⁶ The PCN retained backing from more moderate oligarchs and large landowners, but did not have the same level of support as ARENA. Most moderates were split between PDC, PCN, and AD.

The AD had a constituency of lawyers, professionals, and medium-sized business people. Although AD supported land reform, they wanted to return the banking industry back to the oligarchy.⁴⁷ These contenders put their diverse platforms to the people during a vigorous election campaign, while the FMLN stepped up its activities in the countryside.

The FMLN opposed the election and wanted to stop people from voting.⁴⁸ During the week before the election, forty buses were burned and more than fifty people killed by the FMLN. ARENA headquarters was bombed on 26 March and D'Aubuisson wounded during an ambush of his campaign convoy the following day.⁴⁹ Fighting in the town of Usulután between the army and FMLN prevented anyone from voting in that town. Despite these incidents, voter turnout was high.

⁴⁶Montgomery, Origins and Evolution, 186.

⁴⁷Ibid, 186.

⁴⁸Beloyra, El Salvador, 186.

⁴⁹Schmidt, America's Next Vietnam, 172.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service reported over 1.4 million out of two million registered voted.⁵⁰ It should be noted that voting was mandatory in El Salvador, even with the FMLN threat. Enrique Baloyra was in El Salvador during the election, and his interviews with the voters provide an insight into the Salvadoran people. He states that the people knew the limited impact of their vote, but it was the only way they could endorse a peaceful solution to the crises.⁵¹ The result of the election was that the PDC garnered a plurality, but Duarte lost his position as president of the junta.

⁵⁰U.S. Department of State, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, VI, "Central America," 2 April 1982, I.

⁵¹Baloyra, El Salvador, 175.

Table 3
Final Results of the Constituent Assembly Election
of 28 March 1982

	Votes	Percentage of Valid Votes	Percentage of Total Votes	Seats
ARENA	383,632	29.32	25.83	19
AD	98,364	7.52	6.62	2
PCN	248,964	19.03	16.76	14
PDC	526,890	40.27	35.48	24
POP	12,151	.92	.82	0
PPS	38,504	2.94	2.59	1
Total	1,308,505	100.00	88.10	
valid votes				

Source: Steffen W. Schmidt, El Salvador-America's
Next Vietnam? (Salisbury, NC: Documentary
Publications, 1983), 171.

ARENA aligned with AD to form a right-wing coalition to dominate the assembly. D'Aubuisson controlled the coalition and tried to get himself appointed as interim president, but pressure from the United States and the coalition between PDC and PCN forced the selection of a compromise candidate, Alvaro Magaña.⁵² The result was that the hard-line Right, who promised to undo reforms and eliminate the FMLN, controlled the new government. Any hope for other than a military settlement to the problem seemed elusive and both sides dug in for a protracted conflict.

⁵²Schmidt, America's Next Vietnam, 175.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how the inability of the juntas to affect substantial reforms cemented the union of the Left and spurred the repression by the Right. Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk state that the situation at the time of the coup demanded reform or revolution. The first junta made the initial proclamation of reforms and passed several decrees to support its programs. Of all of the decrees, Baloyra asserts that the state of siege made the civil war official.⁵³ The digression of both sides into armed conflict is a direct result of the failure of these decrees. The inability to control the repression proved fatal. Baloyra asserts that the violence against the Left was the major factor in the polarization of politics and the reason for the collapse of the first junta.⁵⁴ The lack of power of the juntas is hidden by the fact that they remained in power until the election of 1982.

One reason that the juntas survived is because the United States resolved to support reforms through a democratically elected government

⁵³Armstrong and Shenk, The Face of a Revolution, 118.

⁵⁴Baloyra, El Salvador, 93.

States got was a reformist junta and a military that opposed reform with repression. The Reagan administration increased military aid and training assistance in order to help the military defeat the insurgency, but that money went to the expansion of the size of the army, the acquisition of new weapons, and training given by the United States military. This increased the image the military had of itself as a legitimate institution and, thus bolstered, they fought the reforms using their traditional weapon - repression.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

In El Salvador, a coalition of land-holding oligarchs and power oriented soldiers has traditionally opposed any kind of political, economic, or social change -- reformist or revolutionary in nature - - through repressive, often violent measures. Enrique Baloyra's theory of "reactionary despotism" as the form of political domination in El Salvador is widely quoted and accepted throughout the literature on Central America. This theory says that the oligarchy no longer wields power directly, but through a complex coalition with the military. The breakdown of this system resulting from the refusal to reform its economic and political structure is at the root of the crisis in El Salvador. His argument is strong and well documented with comparisons of other regimes in the region.¹

¹ Baloyra, Enrique, "Reactionary Despotism in Central America," Journal of Latin American Studies 15:2, (November 1983), 295-319.

The oligarchy, along with the military, controlled politics and supported the military presidents who ruled from 1932 through the coup of 1979. This coalition was able to co-opt any opposition or repress it into oblivion until opposition organizations began to form in the early 1970s. Any demonstration or call for reform was met with immediate retaliation from the military. Right-wing death squads appeared whenever the Left began to organize. The death squads were indiscriminate in their killings, leaving dismembered bodies along the highways or dumping them in rivers. The Left resorted to kidnapping members of the oligarchy and demanding ransom as a method of filling their war chests. Both sides committed acts of violence, each retaliating for the violence of the other. As the violence increased the economy continued in a downward spiral.

The economy began its downturn after the 1969 war with Honduras. The collapse of the Central American Economic Market took away El Salvador's lucrative export trade which had promoted the growth of industry. The loss of jobs, coupled with the return of over 300,000 homeless refugees from Honduras, exacerbated an already intolerable situation. Economic decline continued throughout the decade as the violence spread and disrupted the economic sector. Foreign investment, particularly

from the United States, decreased almost in proportion to level of violence and the resultant political instability. All of the political, economic, and social problems reached to an intolerable level and resulted in a reform-oriented coup in 1979.

Tommie S. Montgomery, in her book Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution, postulates that El Salvador goes through political cycles that determine the inevitability of coups and the policies and tactics of the government. The political cycle is

- (1) Consolidation of power by the new regime;
- (2) Growing intolerance of dissent and increasing repression;
- (3) Reaction from two quarters: the public and, more important, a progressive faction within the army officer corps, culminating ultimately in a;
- (4) Coup d'etat, led by progressive officers;
- (5) Promulgation of various reforms;
- (6) Reemergence, within the army, of the most conservative faction;
- (7) Consolidation of that power once more.²

²Montgomery, Tommie Sue, Revolution in El Salvador, Origins and Evolution (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 55.

As was seen, this typology held true in the events between 1972 and 1982. After the coup of 1960, the Party of National Conciliation (PCN) continued to have its candidate elected through 1977. Repression from the Right continued to increase throughout the 1970s until the regime of Carlos Humberto Romero, 1977 - 1979, went to extremes unheard of before. The reaction was a coup by reformist officers in 1979. This coup brought a coalition of reformist military officers and civilians into power and provided the first opportunity in many years to change the status quo. Various reform programs were promulgated by the succession of juntas, but their effective implementation was blocked by conservative factions in the military and the oligarchy. Finally, the conservative factions gained power after the 1982 Constituent Assembly election. This is different from other countries in the region who experienced repression and revolution.

Why was it that the failure of reforms of the juntas and the repression from the Right did not bring about a popular uprising such as in Cuba and Nicaragua? First, there was no figure, such as the dictators Batista and Somoza, who could be blamed for the state of the country.

These two men provided a distinct focal point for their opposition. El Salvador had institutions to blame, such as the political system or oligarchy, but that does not provide a clearly focused target for the people. Second, there was not a large middle-class as was the case in Cuba and Nicaragua. A large middle-class provides a broad-based, articulate, and economically powerful opposition to a government or dictator. Third, the coup of 1979 defused the potentially explosive situation. The virtual dictatorship of the military since 1932 culminated in President Romero's extremely repressive regime. Although the 1979 coup did not end repression, the violence came from covert right-wing organizations whose actions and existence could not be blamed on the government. Also, the coup ushered in elections that were open and political parties were once again able to compete for power.

Citizens of the United States have a difficult time understanding Latin American politics and the militaries that engage openly in the political process. It is incomprehensible to us that a man like Robert D'Aubisson could form a political party and almost be elected president. D'Aubisson was linked to death squads, arrested for a coup attempt, and

implicated in the assassination of the Archbishop of El Salvador. Yet, his ARENA party finished second to the PDC in the 1982 Constituent Assembly election. Benjamin Schwarz, in his book American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador, calls D'Aubisson the most popular political figure in El Salvador.³

If this thesis enlightens the United States reader on the complexity and evolution of the situation in El Salvador in the 1970s and early 1980s, prior to the intensification of the insurgency and the increase in United States government assistance, it has served its purpose. The events of the 1970s flowed from traditions and institutions as old as the country itself.

El Salvador was left in a politically polarized situation, but the centrist nature of the junta held out a chance for reform. The coup of 1979 ended the military dictatorship in place since 1932 and opened the door to democracy. However, successive juntas failed to break the oligarchic - military coalition or to implement enacted reforms. Thus, the centrist approach held out little chance for success. This laid the context for a war in which there was little immediate hope for

³Schwarz, 68.

conciliation between Left and Right extremes, both of which employed violence to further their respective cause.

APPENDIX: ABBREVIATIONS

ARENA:	Nationalist Republican Alliance
BPR:	Popular Revolutionary Bloc
CEB	Christian Base Community
COPEFA	Permanent Council of the Armed Forces
CRM	Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses
DRU	Unified Revolutionary Directorate
EPR	Revolutionary Popular Army
ERP	Revolutionary Army of the People
FAL	Armed Forces of the People
FALANGE	Anticommunist Wars of Elimination Liberation Armed Forces
FAPU	United Popular Action Front
FARN	Armed Forces of National Resistance
FD	Democratic Front
FDR	Democratic Revolutionary Front
FECCAS	Christian Federation of Salvadoran Workers
FMLN	Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation
FPL	Popular Forces of Liberation

FRTS	Regional Federation of Salvadoran Workers
GDR	Revolutionary Democratic Government
LP-28	Popular Leagues of the 28th of February
MLP	Popular Liberation Movement
ORDEN	Nationalist Democratic Organization
PAR	Renovating Action Party
PCN	Party of National Conciliation
PCS	Communist Party of El Salvador
PDC	Christian Democratic Party
PRTC	Revolutionary Party of Salvadoran Workers
PRUD	Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification
RN	National Resistance
UNO	National Opposition Union

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